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UNCLAS BANGKOK 001277

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: VEHICLE BOMB STRIKES HOTEL IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

1. (U) SUMMARY: A VEHICLE-BORNE IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE (VBIED) EXPLODED 2/17/2005 OUTSIDE A HOTEL IN NARATHIWAT PROVINCE, SOUTHERN THAILAND. POLICE REPORT 5 DEAD AND 49 INJURED. THIS IS AN ESCALATION IN TACTICS FROM THE DAILY DRIVE-BY SHOOTINGS AND SMALLER IEDS WHICH TYPICALLY TARGET THAI SECURITY FORCES. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) DETAILS:
ACCORDING TO ROYAL THAI POLICE (RTP) SOURCES AND PRESS REPORTS, AT 1905 HRS ON 2/17/2005, A VBIED EXPLODED OUTSIDE THE MARINA HOTEL IN SUNG NGAI KOH LOC DISTRICT OF NARATHIWAT PROVINCE, SOUTHERN THAILAND. THE HOTEL IS LOCATED APPROXIMATELY 50 METERS FROM A LOCAL POLICE STATION IN AN ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT OF THE TOWN. THE INITIAL POLICE REPORTS INDICATED THE VBIED VEHICLE WAS A NISSAN NV PICK-UP TRUCK. LATER, OTHER RELIABLE SOURCES HAVE REPORTED THE GREEN NISSAN TRUCK PARKED OUTSIDE THE HOTEL TO APPARENTLY TO HOLD THE PARKING SPOT FOR ANOTHER TOYOTA SEDAN WHICH WAS THE VBIED. WITNESSES SAY THE PERSON WHO PARKED THE VBIED ESCAPED ON A MOPED, OR ALTERNATIVELY, IN THE GREEN NISSAN PICK-UP. ONE REPORT INDICATES THE POLICE HAVE RECOVERED CCTV FOOTAGE OF THE ATTACK.

3. (SBU) POLICE AND OTHER SOURCES HAVE INDICATED THE VBIED CONSISTED OF 50-100 KGS OF AMMONIUM NITRATE, DYNAMITE, AND SHRAPNEL. POLICE ARE WITHHOLDING PUBLIC CONFIRMATION OF EXPLOSIVE PENDING LABORATORY ANALYSIS. ADDITIONAL REPORTS INDICATE THE VBIED HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS A STOLEN CAR THAT PREVIOUSLY BELONGED TO A MILITARY NCO KILLED IN NARATHIWAT IN 2004. MOST OF THE DEAD AND INJURED WERE AT A RESTAURANT LOCATED IN THE FRONT OF THE HOTEL.

4. (SBU) POLICE BELIEVE THE VBIED WAS DETONATED BY MOBILE PHONE, A COMMON TACTIC EMPLOYED BY THAI SEPARATISTS. THE ESCALATION FROM SMALLER ROADSIDE AND MOPED IEDS TO LARGER CAPACITY VBIEDS IS DISTURBING TO THAI POLICE, AND US EMBASSY SECURITY OFFICIALS ARE SIMILARLY CONCERNED. THIS ATTACK CONFIRMS VBIED THREAT INFORMATION THAT HAD BEEN CIRCULATING IN THE AREA SINCE SEPT 2004, AND MAY PORTEND SIMILAR ATTACKS SOON. UNCONFIRMED REPORTS INDICATE AN ADDITIONAL THREE VBIEDS ARE BEING PREPARED. THE FREQUENCY OF SMALL SCALE BOMBINGS AND SHOOTINGS AGAINST POLICE, MILITARY, FIRST RESPONDER, AND THAI GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAS INCREASED SINCE THE THAI FEB 6 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. THIS MAY BE ONE OF THE FIRST ATTACKS PURELY AGAINST CIVILIAN TARGETS. AND IN WHAT MAY BE A SHOW OF CONTINUING CAPABILITIES AND STRENGTH IN THE FACE OF CURRENT THAI SECURITY EFFORTS, THIS ATTACK OCCURRED ON THE SAME EVENING THAT THAI PRIME MINISTER THAKSIN SHINAWATRA WAS IN THE TROUBLED SOUTHERN PROVINCES TALKING ABOUT TAKING DECISIVE ACTION TO STOP THE VIOLENCE.
BOYCE